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REMARKS BY

U.S. AMBASSADOR DAN MOZENA AT THE AMERICAN ALUMNI ASSOCIATION IFTAR

SAJNA RESTAURANT, BANANI

August 9, 2012

Tahsin Aman, American Alumni Association President

Mike Harker, our Cultural Affairs Officer and point person for engagement with alumni

AAA Executive Committee Members, AAA Members and Honored Guests

Thanks, Tahsin, for the warm welcome and for having me come back.

I am especially pleased to meet with the American Alumni Association during Ramadan.

Ramadan is a special time for me, a time for introspection, a time for reflection, a time to consider how small we are compared to the power of God, a time to be thankful for our many blessings. I truly have been blessed in so many ways, most especially by being able to live and serve in Bangladesh, a country that I deeply love...each of us in this room is fortunate ... Ramadan reminds us that we must be thankful for these blessings.

This evening I thought that I would share an update on the US-Bangladesh relationship. It has been some months since we last met, and much has happened. First, I'd like to take a look at the all-important people-to-people dimension of the relationship, and then assess the relationship more broadly.

You are living proof of the value of an education in America, and my goal is to expand by ten-fold the number of Bangladeshis studying in the U.S. We have made a good start toward our goal ... last year Bangladesh had the fastest growth rate in the region of the number of students studying in the U.S. ... a growth rate of nearly 10%. The number of students in the U.S. is now up to 3000, but I think it should be 30,000, and that's my target. Our ongoing collaboration with AAA to present the GRE test seminars is a grand success, and we look forward to continuing this. I think EducationUSA and AAA can work together even more to get the word out about the opportunities of studying in the U.S.

I also wish to applaud the AAA for helping recently returned Bangladeshi graduates of American universities through the Brain Gain initiative, which offers a great professional and social network of dynamic people with the common experience of studying abroad in America. Similarly, we look forward to partnering with AAA to find ways to increase opportunities for Americans to study in Bangladesh.

Last year the number of Americans studying here went up 57% to 132 students, but we can do much better, as America needs to know the world's seventh largest country a whole lot more.

I am pleased with the progress made in the people-to-people dimension of the bilateral relationship, and I look forward to the partnership between the Embassy and AAA achieving even more.

Changing lens, I would like to take a look at the broader US-Bangladesh relationship. First, I would like to caution against believing everything that you see in the newspapers, at least as they relate to America and whatever I or others at the Embassy might have said. Every morning I review the papers with the greatest trepidation as I look to discover what I said the previous day ... invariably, I am most surprised! I suggest that if you want the straight scoop, please go to our website where all of my presentations are posted, in both English and Bangla.

The relationship between America and Bangladesh is excellent, the word that both Hillary Clinton and Dipu Moni use to describe the relationship, and I can think of none better. Secretary Clinton came to Bangladesh in May to acknowledge, to celebrate and to institutionalize this relationship. Noting that a year from now, she would no longer be Secretary of State, Secretary Clinton said she wanted to ensure that the close relationship endured, declaring that the partnership is bigger than the individuals now driving it. Thus, the Secretary and the Foreign Minister, under the approving eye of the Prime Minister, signed an agreement establishing a Partnership Dialogue, whereby the two countries meet once a year at a senior level to review the relationship and give it strategic guidance. I hope the first meeting of the partnership will be next month in Washington.

The US-Bangladesh partnership is extremely deep and effective across so many areas of engagement. Let me explain:

- Countering the threat of terrorism and violent extremism. You will recall that only six or seven years ago, many queried whether Bangladesh would become a terrorism quagmire. Certainly, there was good reason to ask; the nation experienced a horrific attack on the then opposition leader, in a single day more than 500 explosions occurred in 63 of the 64 districts across Bangladesh, and the list goes on. The question of whether Bangladesh is the next Afghanistan no longer arises; surely none of you has heard it for years. I think our strong partnership in countering this threat played an important part in diminishing it, and both countries are fully committed to sustaining this partnership.

- Improving health. The partnership is key to Bangladesh's impressive progress toward achieving its Millennium Development Goals of reducing maternal mortality by 40% and reducing child under five mortality by 45%, both by 2015. The partnership has also enabled Bangladeshis to have the family size they want, as the fertility rate has dropped from 6.3 births per woman to 2.3 since independence, approaching the replacement rate of 2.1. Over 30 million Bangladeshis count on USG-supported health services ... many of you know Smiling Sun ... for their primary health care services. There is so much more in this area, but I must go on.
- Food security. Bangladesh is a focus country for President Obama's Feed the Future initiative, which strives to improve food security by increasing agricultural production, improving the livelihoods of people so they can better access needed food, and helping mothers better select and prepare nutritious and balanced diets for their families. In this arena, too, the partnership has already yielded rich dividends as more than 2.3 million farmers are using improved technologies, including fertilizer deep placement, on over 575,000 hectares. Other farmers have expanded their fish ponds and implemented new fish and shrimp management approaches. The results are dramatic as during the first 18 months of this program, through March 31, the value of crops, fish and shrimp and horticulture has already increased by over \$220 million ... and this is only the start.
- Mitigation and adaptation for climate change. We all know that Bangladesh is greatly impacted by climate change, and our partnership has already built or rebuilt 547 cyclone shelters and is now building an additional 116; each shelter provides refuge for about 3000 people during cyclones or floods, and serves as a community center or school for 150 students when not needed for shelter. The partnership is also building a network of storm proof communication centers, called Coastal Crisis Management Centers, across the most exposed parts of the country. The partnership has developed saline, flood and drought resistant seed varieties, worked with communities in vulnerable areas to prepare for disasters and to elevate their homesteads to protect them from flooding.
- Democracy and governance. Our partnership continues to work effectively in strengthening Bangladesh's emerging democratic institutions, such as parliament, the political parties, local governance, the media and this list, too, goes on. The partnership is also engaging to support the next national elections.
- Security. Our military-military partnership continues to yield great results, including the creation and training of a Navy Seals-like capacity so Bangladesh can secure its maritime borders, engagement with the First Para Commandoes to help them secure land borders, training for international peacekeepers, and I'm just getting started. The partnership also heavily supports

Bangladesh efforts to improve its police and justice systems, as the nation endeavors to move beyond the lathi approach to policing to a community-based framework.

I must stop ... I hear growling stomachs and I could wax on for hours describing the tangible fruits of the US-Bangladesh partnership, but I think I have made my point. Of course, in any relationship, even in relationships as close as the one between America and Bangladesh, there will be the inevitable bumps in the road ... and that is what people like me get paid to deal with and resolve as quickly as possible. These snags may dominate newspaper headlines, but they do not define our relationship, which, as I said at the outset, is “excellent” ... not “excellent” in some vague diplomatic gobbly-gook sense, but excellent in the Webster Dictionary sense.

I am proud of this partnership between America and Bangladesh and proud that America is helping Bangladesh realize its dream of building the Golden Bangladesh, the Middle-Income Bangladesh.

I hope AAA is proud, too, of its role in cementing people-to-people relations between our two countries.

Thank you for this opportunity to share some of my thoughts.

Thank you.

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